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ABSTRACT

This paper describes efforts to design an evaluation system that has as its primary objective helping schools effect positive change through the Accelerated Schools Project. Three characteristics were deemed essential: (1) that the evaluation be useful and meaningful; (2) that it be sensitive to local conditions; and (3) that evaluations of projects and teachers be linked so that project goals and individual goals mesh. The evaluation system incorporates key features of the Accelerated Schools program and the planning process defined by Act 135 of the South Carolina legislature, as well as the state's new goals-based teacher evaluation system, the ADEPT system. By linking goals developed as part of systematic schoolwide planning with individual professional goals, teachers can track the interplay between their own professional development and systemic changes occurring in their schools. The framework is in the design stage, with pilot testing being planned. Four tables and one figure illustrate the discussion. (Contains eight references.) (SLD)

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Linking Project Evaluation and Goals-Based Teacher Evaluation: Evaluating the Accelerated Schools Project in South Carolina

by

Christine Finnan
Sara Calhoun Davis

University/College of Charleston

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meetings

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Linking Project Evaluation and Goals-Based Teacher Evaluation: Evaluating the Accelerated Schools Project in South Carolina[1]

by
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University/College of Charleston

When we began thinking about this project, we asked ourselves, "Why do we usually conduct evaluations of projects?" Despite desires to the contrary, we usually conduct evaluations for two reasons: because we need to demonstrate success to maintain project funding, and because the agency or foundation providing the contract or grant mandates an evaluation. These reasons should not be disparaged; the initiative would not exist without some external funding, and funding agencies have a right to know if their money is being spent wisely. However, evaluations conducted for an external audience rarely provide much help to those implementing the initiative. Evaluations are usually done for decision-makers (Cousins & Earl, 1992) but we forget that the implementers of programs are the ultimate decision-makers (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Bardach, 1980).

The authors of this paper have a personal reason to question the validity of a great deal of project evaluations. Finnan does so because she once was responsible for conducting large, national evaluations of educational initiatives. We worked hard, brought together many competent people and tried to make our evaluations as responsive to field conditions as possible. Despite these efforts, many of us felt uncomfortable with the process because the evaluation plans were not as responsive to local conditions as we would have liked, and the results rarely provided much

help to the people attempting to implement the initiatives. Davis taught middle and high school for twelve years. In that time, many initiatives came and went. Although she was occasionally asked to fill out surveys or participate in interviews, she was never involved in designing these evaluations and never saw the results of the evaluations.

This paper describes our efforts to design an evaluation system that has as its primary objective helping schools effect positive change through the Accelerated Schools Project. We believe that evaluations need to have three characteristics. First, they must be useful and meaningful to the people actually engaged in implementing the initiative. Second, they need to be sensitive to local conditions. Third, evaluations of projects and teachers should be linked so that project goals and individual goals mesh. This paper will describe our efforts to design an evaluation system that incorporates these three characteristics. The paper will first provide contextual information about educational initiatives in South Carolina, including the Accelerated Schools Project. It will then describe our process of developing the evaluation system. The paper concludes with a description of the evaluation system we are developing and our plan for implementing it next year.

South Carolina and the Accelerated Schools Project

The first accelerated school in South Carolina was launched in 1991 in Charleston. Since then, twelve more schools have joined the project. The schools are supported by the South Carolina Accelerated Schools Center (SCASC) at the University/College of Charleston. The SCASC staff trains and mentors coaches who work with schools across the state. We also coach local schools, organize biannual

Accelerated Schools network meetings and provide leadership in the following areas: strategies to improve the Accelerated Schools process; teacher preparation and professional development; linking with state mandates; and evaluation. The SCASC receives funding from the State of South Carolina and from a grant from the BellSouth Foundation. The BellSouth Foundation grant supports the development of this evaluation system.

Recent state legislation aimed at improving schools has had a profound effect on the implementation of the Accelerated Schools Project in South Carolina. In 1993, the state legislature passed the Early Childhood Development and Academic Assistance Act of 1993 (commonly referred to in South Carolina as Act 135). This act emphasizes the importance of early intervention, community and parental involvement, and classroom innovations that will lead to better achievement for all children. The act also mandates that decisions about how to best serve children be made at the district and school level. To do this, all schools are required to engage in a systematic planning process to develop five year improvement plans. By the end of this year, all schools and districts in South Carolina will have a completed Act 135 plan.

Schools were not required to follow any one planning process, although the State Department of Education provided training to all districts in a strategic planning process that is not unlike the Accelerated Schools process (see Table 1 for an outline of the key components of the process). From the perspective of implementing and evaluating the Accelerated Schools Project, the most significant difference between the two planning systems is the creation of learner standards and

TABLE ONE

SDE's District/ School Renewal Process Act 135 Planning	Accelerated Schools Process	Goals-Based Teacher Evaluation
Beliefs		
Vision	Vision	Professional Growth Goal Reflecting School/District Mission
Mission		
Learner Standards		
Needs Assessment	Taking Stock	Assessment of Strengths & Targets for Growth
Performance Goals		
Strategies	Setting Priorities	
Action Plans	Inquiry Process •Focus on Problem •Brainstorm Solutions •Action Plan •Pilot Test or Implement	Professional Growth Activity
Evaulation of Strategies	•Evaluate and Re-assess	Success Criteria End-of-Year Summary

performance goals in the planning process. The learner standards, set by the school community, are standards that all children should meet by the time they exit the school, and performance goals translate these standards into goals. These standards and goals focus most of the school's attention on what is happening in the classroom. For program evaluation, the learner standards provide student-level standards, set by the school, upon which the school can assess its actions. Because both the Accelerated Schools process and the Act 135 strategic planning process engage the school communities in vision setting and goal setting (Accelerated Schools Project's goal setting is less explicit than the Act 135 strategic planning process), they lend themselves to standards-based program evaluation.

Another feature of the state context does not directly influence the Accelerated Schools process, but it provides an exciting opportunity to link program evaluation with teacher evaluation. This year, a new goals-based teacher evaluation system, commonly referred to as ADEPT, is being pilot-tested across the state.[2] The new system allows teachers, under the supervision of their principal, to set three year professional goals and establish a personal plan to achieve the goals. This system differs radically from the checklist evaluation that has been in place for years. It allows teachers greater autonomy in charting their own professional development. As illustrated in Table 1, the process of setting goals or a vision, assessing needs and strengths, identifying actions, and evaluating the actions run parallel to the schoolwide planning processes. For this reason, we feel that a match between this goals-based teacher evaluation and standards-based program evaluation exists.

Efforts to Develop a Self-Evaluation System for Accelerated Schools

In 1994, the University/College of Charleston and University of New Orleans received a two year grant from the BellSouth Foundation to develop a self-evaluation system that teachers can use to gauge their progress in restructuring their school. Although we communicate frequently about our plans, each institution is working independently in developing the systems. Our initial activity at theUniversity/College of Charleston was to review all of the evaluation models developed by Accelerated Schools Centers across the country and by the National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project at Stanford University. Through this process, we became familiar with all of the current evaluation models that have been applied to evaluating the Accelerated Schools Project.

We, like many other evaluators (Cousins & Earl, 1992; Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Dawson & D'Amico, 1985; Greene, 1988; Weiss, 1983), thought it was imperative to involve teachers and principals in the early stages of the development of our evaluation system. We asked teachers from the three schools in South Carolina that have been involved in the Accelerated Schools Project at least two years to become members of the Accelerated Schools Assessment Advisory Board (ASAAB)[3]. Each school identified three representatives who met with us to discuss the following questions:

- What do you say when people ask if the Accelerated Schools Project is making a difference in your school?
- What evidence do you cite to support your statement?
- What evidence do you wish you had?
- How would you suggest collecting this evidence?

We then asked them to synthesize their responses in light of the following

questions that relate to the Accelerated Schools philosophy and process:

- Does this evidence show internalization of the three principles?
- Does this evidence you want demonstrate that you have powerful learning occurring in the classroom and throughout the school?
- Does this evidence show democratic governance?
- Does this evidence show active family and community involvement?
- Does this evidence show high expectations for all children?
- Does this evidence show that the Accelerated Schools process is being followed.

Their responses were recorded and summarized. We evaluated this process and altered it slightly when we met with the three principals from the target schools. We simplified the questions we asked them to respond to the following:

- When people visit your school, what evidence do you cite to show that it is or is not working?
- What evidence do you wish that you had in order to support your perceptions?

We felt that we did not have enough input from teachers from our initial meeting with the Advisory Board, so we had graduate assistants conduct informal interviews with teachers at the three schools. Approximately twenty-one teachers volunteered to answer three questions:

- When people visit your school, what evidence do you cite to show that the Accelerated Schools Project is or is not working?
- What evidence do you wish that you had in order to support your perceptions?
- How would your school be different today without ASP?

The input from all of these sources led us to the following conclusions. First, teachers and principals are more interested in realizing their vision and achieving their goals than they are in determining how to document and assess their progress. Second, teachers are primarily interested in assessing how their involvement in the Accelerated Schools Project affects the students in their classroom. Third, both

teachers and principals want any assessment efforts to fit within the context of the Accelerated Schools process and the Act 135 planning process. The principals were interested in working with a systematic evaluation process, but they were cautious about engaging in any kind of program evaluation effort that would detract from the progress their school communities are making. Fourth, the teachers and principals are not as concerned with how their schools are doing relative to other schools as they are with understanding how well are doing relative to their own vision and learner standards.

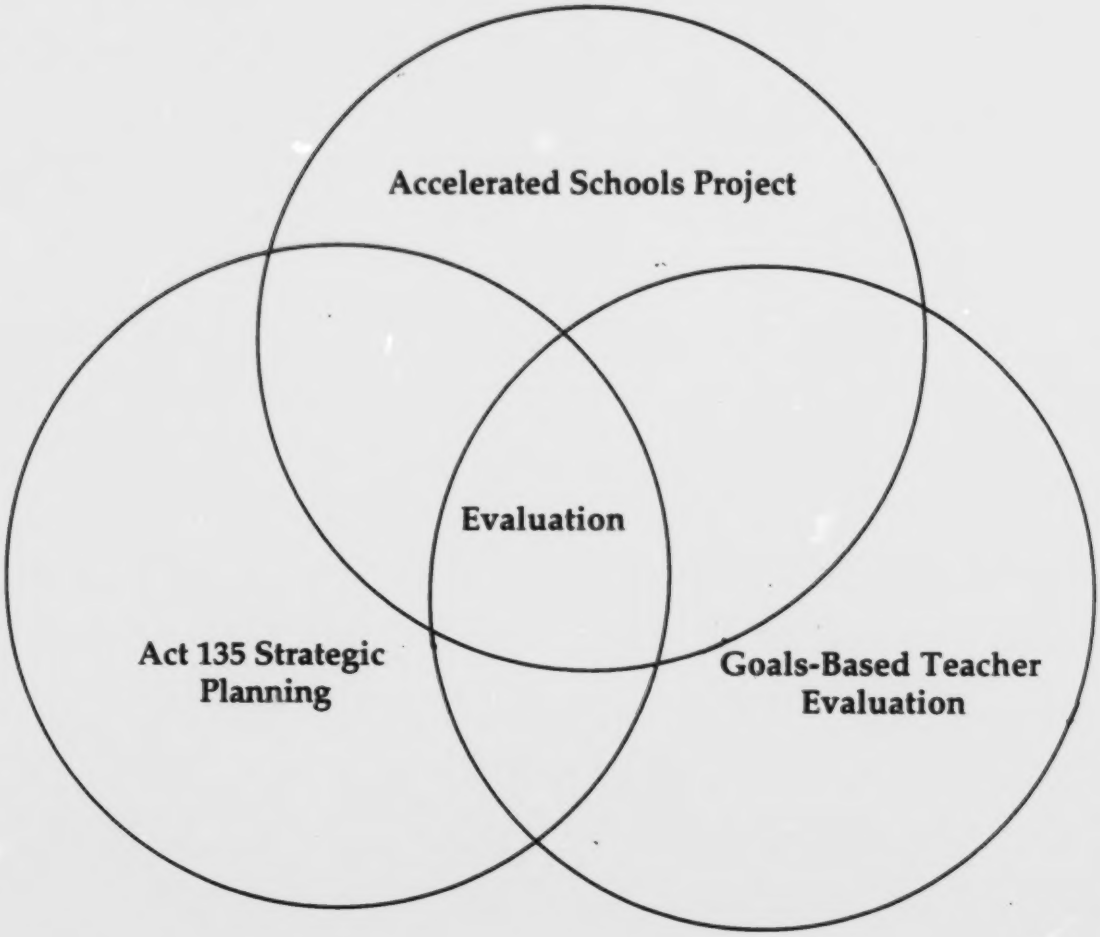
Creating a Comprehensive Standards and Goals-Based Project and Teacher Evaluation System

The evaluation system we are designing incorporates key features of the Accelerated Schools and the Act 135 planning process and the ADEPT goals-based teacher evaluation system. We believe that a well designed evaluation framework can create linkages between processes that might otherwise exist separate from each other. Figure 1 illustrates how evaluation can play a central role in moving all three processes forward. By linking the goals developed as a part of systematic schoolwide planning with individual professional goals, teachers can track the interplay between their own professional development and systemic changes occurring in their school. Evaluation then becomes an integral part of charting and understanding the change process.

We are currently working on a framework that will simplify and clarify the evaluation process for teachers. The framework we are developing provides a structure for teachers to write their own scoring rubrics so that they are responsible

FIGURE 1

INTERPLAY OF ACCELERATED SCHOOLS PROJECT, ACT 135 STRATEGIC PLANNING, AND GOALS-BASED TEACHER EVALUATION



for identifying the benchmarks they think will show progress toward their goals. We like using process oriented rubrics in evaluation because they allow school community members to see that change is not instantaneous, but that it is a process that can be charted. The rubrics provide a concrete road map toward the goals established. We decided to develop a framework for teachers to use in creating their own scoring rubrics rather than develop a set of rubrics for them. We believe that the evaluation process will be more useful if school communities set their own standards and develop their own benchmarks. This also allows teachers to link schoolwide evaluation with their own professional evaluation.

Our evaluation framework is presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Table 2 illustrates how the school's vision and standards and the teacher's professional goals can be linked. In this example, we begin with a hypothetical learner standard - *Our students will demonstrate reading and writing proficiency by the time they leave this school.* This learner standard, along with several others, guide actions for the entire school. An action plan for each of the learner standards is sketched out in the plan, but it can be modified each year.

The goals-based teacher evaluation system does not require that teachers develop individual professional goals that parallel the learner standards, but we hope to encourage teachers to do so through the use of this evaluation framework. Continuing our hypothetical example, a teacher in this school should be willing to set a related goal for him/herself: *I will be able to teach reading and writing so that all students will demonstrate proficiency.* Since the link between learner standards

Table 2

Linking Schoolwide and Teacher Goals

School Vision				
We resolve to make our school a safe, happy, well-equipped learning environment; free of fear, abuse, drugs and destructive behavior. Students will be challenged by the teachers, parents, community and themselves to reach their maximum potential on and off campus.				
Learner Standard for School	**Actions for the Future**	**Immediate Actions**	**Actions just Completed**	**Baseline - Pre - ASP/Act 135**
Our students will demonstrate reading & writing proficiency		Implement an Emergent Literacy Program	Defined our problem by developing and testing hypotheses, brainstorming solutions and developing action plan	Too many children experiencing failure in reading & writing No systematic approach to addressing the problem
Teacher's Professional Goal	**Actions for the Future**	**Immediate Actions**	**Actions just Completed**	**Baseline - Pre - ASP/Act 135**
I will be able to teach reading & writing so that all students will demonstrate proficiency	-model Emergent Literacy techniques to colleagues -assess success of techniques with students	-enroll in graduate course in Emergent Literacy -model sample lesson with students	-hypothesized why students in my class not successful readers -tested hypotheses, brainstormed solutions, developed action plan	-most students in my class are not successful readers & writers -I do not enjoy teaching reading & writing

and goals-based teacher evaluation has not been formally made, we will work with pilot schools to determine an appropriate number of content goals for teachers to choose for their focus. They will probably choose to focus on one or two goals related to the learner standards. Currently, teachers are asked to work on three goals - one subject area goal, one in instruction or assessment, and one extracurricular or professional goal.

Returning to the framework, one can see that it provides a vehicle to chart a school's and an individual's process in moving from a baseline to the goals and standards. The framework also makes clear the importance of the Accelerated Schools process in achieving the goals.

Table 3 describes the evidence we encourage school community members to collect to demonstrate that they are moving toward meeting their learner standards. The framework encourages school community members to evaluate each step in the process of achieving their goals. They will collect data that will support progress through the following stages: documentation of the need for action; support for the design of a specific action; documentation supporting the continuation or modification of the action; additional documentation supporting the continuation or modification of the action; and finally, evidence that the learner standard has been met.

The evidence for each of these stages is organized into four categories that are described below:

- *Evidence related to the achievement of the goal.* School community members will be asked to provide evidence supporting their need for the action, the

Table 3

Evidence of Accomplishment of School Goals

Evidence of Accomplishment	Evidence supporting continuation or modification of action	Evidence supporting continuation or modification of action	Evidence supporting need for action	Evidence of challenge
• students are more successful in reading - improved standardized test scores - evidence of interest in reading	• evidence of need to continue or modify action	• evidence of need to continue or modify action - number of participants - classroom effects - implementation concerns	• evidence of need for planned action - results of hypothesis testing - solutions explored	• evidence that students are not successful in reading - standardized test scores - survey of student interest in reading
• all steps of the Accelerated Schools process were used - evidence of successful completion of all steps	• evidence of use of inquiry to modify action	• evidence of use of inquiry process - documentation of pilot test or implementation - continuous assessment and refinement	• evidence of use of inquiry process - hypotheses developed and tested - solutions explored - completion of action plan	• evidence that taking stock was thorough and justifies emphasis on reading
• the action was guided by the Accelerated Schools philosophy - high expectations for all children were held - built on the strengths of all - people closest to the children made and took responsibility for actions - everyone agreed that this was the best action to take	• evidence of continued influence of AS philosophy	• evidence of influence of AS philosophy - does the action accelerate learning of all children - does the action build on the strengths of all - were the people closest to the children responsible for making and carrying out the action - does everyone still agree that this is the best action	• evidence of influence of AS philosophy - will the action accelerate learning of all children - will the actions build on the strengths of all - will the people closest to the children be responsible for making and carrying out the action - does everyone agree that this is the best action	• evidence that AS philosophy guided data collection - everyone involved - strengths & weaknesses identified - all agree on the focus of data collection
• the action meets the intent of Act 135 - action focuses on improving education for all children - action focuses on earliest intervention possible - action builds links for improved parental & community interaction - action was innovative	• evidence that the action continues to meet the intent of Act 135	• evidence that the action meets the intent of Act 135	• evidence that the action is designed to meet the intent of Act 135	• evidence that the goals of Act 135 are incorporated

success of the implementation of the action, and evidence that the goal has been accomplished. Data used for this documentation will combine both existing data (e.g. standardized test scores, taking stock survey data) and data collected during the problem definition stage of the Accelerated Schools inquiry process.

• *Evidence that the Accelerated Schools process was used.* The second set of data will document that the Accelerated Schools process was followed. School community members can use minutes from cadre meetings, written descriptions of actions planned and implemented, and evaluations of plans.

• *Evidence that the plans and actions were guided by the Accelerated Schools philosophy.* In order to keep the Accelerated Schools philosophy central to this process, school communities will be asked to document how these actions accelerate learning and build on the three principles and values of the Accelerated Schools Project.

• *Evidence that the action fulfills the intent of Act 135.* As a part of the evaluation framework, schools will document how their actions meet the intent of Act 135. The evaluation framework will ensure that key provisions of the Act are integrated into all actions.

Teachers will receive training in identifying and collecting appropriate evidence. We will encourage them to collect both qualitative and quantitative data as evidence.

Table 4 parallels Table 3 in format. It provides a guide to identifying and collecting evidence, but its focus is on evidence that documents individual teachers' progress toward meeting their professional goals. Teachers will use this framework

Table 4

Evidence of Accomplishment of Individual Goals

Evidence of Accomplishment	Evidence supporting continuation or modification of action	Evidence supporting continuation or modification of action	Evidence supporting need for action	Evidence of challenge
• my students are proficient in reading & writing - students performing at or above grade level in reading & writing - increased enjoyment in teaching reading & writing	• evidence of need to continue or modify action	• evidence of need to continue or modify action -evaluation of action chosen -modification of action	• evidence of need for planned action - results of hypothesis testing - solutions explored	• evidence that students in my class are not successful in reading & writing - observation - standardized test scores - reports from teachers one grade up
• all stages of the Accelerated Schools philosophy, as adapted to my personal improvement, were used	• evidence of continued use of the inquiry process - evaluation - modification	• evidence of use of personal inquiry process - documentation of action implemented - evaluation of action - modification of action	• evidence of use of a personal inquiry process - hypotheses developed and tested - solutions explored - design of action plan	• evidence that personal taking stock was thorough - examination of personal strengths and weaknesses related to teaching reading
• my actions were guided by the AS philosophy - I held high expectations for all students - I built on the strengths of my students, myself & others - I accomplished an action that moved me & my students toward our shared vision - I took responsibility for my own professional growth	• evidence that the AS philosophy continues to guide actions	• evidence that the AS philosophy continues to guide actions - did the action accelerate the learning of all students - did the action build on the strengths of students, myself & others - did the action move me & my students toward the school's shared vision - did I take responsibility to carry out the action	• evidence that the AS philosophy guides the actions I choose - will the action accelerate the learning of all students - will the action build on the strengths of students, myself & others - will the action move me & my students toward the school's shared vision - will I take responsibility to carry out the action	• evidence that AS philosophy guided personal taking stock - do I hold high expectations for all students - do I build on the strengths of students, myself & others - do I share in the school's vision for the school - do I feel empowered & responsible to improve my teaching
• my actions met the intent of Act 135 and ADEPT	• evidence that the action continues to further the goals of Act 135 and ADEPT	• evidence that the action furthers the goals of Act 135 and ADEPT	• evidence that the action I choose will further the goals of Act 135 and ADEPT	• evidence that the goals of Act 135 and ADEPT were considered

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to determine if they are achieving their goals, if they are using the inquiry process to determine their own professional goals, if their activities are guided by the Accelerated Schools philosophy, and if their individual actions fulfill the intent of Act 135 and ADEPT (goals-based teacher evaluation).

This framework will be refined this year and pilot tested in one or two schools that have been engaged in the Accelerated Schools Project at least three years and express interest in participating in pilot testing this framework will be selected for the pilot test. We will work with the principal and interested teachers during the summer to design a training session that will engage everyone in the school in working with this evaluation framework. We will also work closely with the South Carolina State Department of Education to refine links with Act 135 and the ADEPT goals-based teacher evaluation system.

Conclusions

This paper describes our efforts to develop a framework for school community members to use to evaluate their own professional and schoolwide improvement activities. The framework is still at the design stage, and it will not be pilot tested until next year. Its design is shaped by our desire to develop an evaluation system that is useful to teachers, principals, other staff members, and parents. We believe that if we can develop a framework for evaluation that is useful in guiding school and individual professional improvement, we will be able to extract data that is useful to external stakeholders - those who set policy and determine funding allocations. Although external stakeholders are extremely important in creating a positive context for school improvement, we believe that

evaluation geared only to collecting data for an outside audience undermines the importance of the ultimate policymakers - those who implement change in the school.

In the 1970's and 1980's we realized the importance of "street-level implementers" - people in schools, and health and social service agencies who frequently rendered projects unrecognizable to those who designed them (Bardach, 1980; Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Wehlage, Smith & Lipman, 1992). With the movement toward site-based planning and decentralized decision-making, this gap between project developers and implementers is disappearing. Projects like the Accelerated Schools Project and legislation like South Carolina's Act 135 put both the design and the implementation of school change initiatives in the hands of school community members. In keeping with these changes, we also need to put the responsibility for evaluation in their hands as well.

As the distinctions between project developers and implementers blurs, so should distinctions between evaluators and participants. The current trend in evaluation toward stakeholder and participant involvement in evaluation is an example (Cousins & Earl, 1992; Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Dawson & D'Amico, 1985; Greene, 1988). This trend places the participants in multiple roles. They become the designers, implementers, and clients of the evaluation.

The framework we are developing also provides a vehicle to create a comprehensive whole of school initiatives (e.g. the Accelerated Schools Project), state mandates (e.g. Act 135 planning), and teachers' professional evaluation (e.g. the ADEPT goals-based professional evaluation). Separate initiatives are rarely

evaluated under one umbrella, and links between the evaluation of individuals and organizations are even more unusual. A great frustration for teachers is the feeling of being pulled in so many different directions that they cannot effectively work in their classrooms. Teachers should not be responsible for making the connections between change initiatives, state mandates, and professional evaluations. Their primary responsibility is to their students, and the more these connections can be made for them, the less they will feel pulled apart by external demands.

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[2] ADEPT stands for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teachers.
[3] We want to thank the teacher representatives and the principals from Berry Elementary School, Fraser Elementary School, and Memminger Elementary School for their participation in the evaluation planning.